

**Council on Postsecondary Education  
March 6, 2009**

**Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative  
Report and Policy Recommendations**

With a \$500,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Council has worked with postsecondary institutions and other partners to create a policy framework that addresses both state- and institution-level policies to support adult learners.

In order to attract, retain, and graduate more adult learners, three policy groups were formed to address issues important to adult students.

- Flexible academic programming: Because of work and family obligations, adults need flexible course delivery options, such as online learning opportunities, modularized content, and evening and weekend classes.
- Credit for prior learning: Adults want credit for college-level learning obtained through life and work experiences that are relevant to their degree programs. Credit for prior learning can take several forms, including credit for military experience, credit for corporate training programs, and credit by examination.
- Financial aid: Adults often attend school part-time, and their financial aid options may be limited. Adult learners, like other students, are affected by the rising cost of a college education.

Representatives from public institutions, the Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities, the Council on Postsecondary Education, and the private sector drafted policy recommendations in each of these three areas with the purpose of helping more adults succeed in postsecondary education. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provided consulting for each of the groups.

The recommendations from each of the groups have been incorporated into one document addressing three major barriers for adult learners:

- Access: Putting postsecondary learning within reach of adults.
- Affordability: Reducing the cost of postsecondary learning for adults.
- Aspiration: Knowing that postsecondary learning is desirable and within reach.

The working groups recommend the following:

- Each public postsecondary institution should have an adult learner advocate on its campus.
- All public postsecondary institutions should reevaluate and expand policies regarding the opportunity to earn credit for college-level experiential learning in one or more of its forms.

- All public postsecondary institutions should promote to external audiences the opportunity to earn credit for college-level experiential learning.
- Credit for prior learning must be transferrable among postsecondary institutions.
- All public postsecondary institutions should conduct ongoing awareness campaigns and professional development for administrators, faculty, and staff about prior learning assessment.
- The Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority should distribute Go Higher grants only after College Access Program (CAP) funds are exhausted.
- The state should develop a strategy to increase the number of potential college students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Options include partnering with tax preparers, one-stop career centers, adult education centers, and other organizations. Institutions could utilize Educational Opportunity Centers and TRIO offices to help students complete the FAFSA.
- All public postsecondary institutions should develop flexible degree programs, based on state and national best practices, to meet the needs of adult students and employers. While many Kentucky institutions are already providing some flexible academic programming options, these programs should be expanded to include additional degree programs in high-need career fields.
- All public postsecondary institutions should offer a full range of accessible and comprehensive support services to adult learners participating in the flexible degree programs.
- All public postsecondary institutions should develop incentives for faculty and staff participation in professional development that raises their awareness of the unique needs of adult learners.
- Employers should be encouraged to offer Lifelong Learning Accounts or other educational assistance benefits and develop personnel policies that can help adults as they pursue postsecondary education.
- The Commonwealth should fully fund existing financial aid programs.
- The Commonwealth should develop a coordinated statewide college outreach strategy for adults.
- The Commonwealth should develop a comprehensive, user-friendly college access Web site that adequately serves adult learners. Relevant parties should evaluate existing sites and either combine best aspects into an existing site or create a new statewide Web site.